

2014-15 Federal Priorities: School Nutrition

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Read CFPA's complete 2014-15 Federal Priorities for Child Nutrition. [link](#)

For more than 20 years, California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) has initiated and incubated evidence-based policies to improve the health and wellbeing of low-income Californians. CFPA has a long history of advancing policy solutions that optimize the federal nutrition programs. We recognize the potential of these programs to address the immense scope and scale of challenges associated with poor nutrition across our state. CFPA's 2014-15 federal priorities for school nutrition seek to (1) maximize the reach of the school lunch and school breakfast programs and (2) optimize the benefits of school meal participation to better meet the nutritional needs of California's children. The following opportunities represent CFPA's top federal policy priorities for school nutrition, based on the most pressing needs of California's children and the current political climate.

The Current State of Health and Hunger for Children in California

Hunger and Poverty Hurt our Children and Families

Over 23% of children in California live in poverty. An additional 24% live between 100% and 200% of the Federal Poverty Line.¹ This means nearly half of all children in California live in families that struggle to meet their most basic needs. In fact, across our state, at least two million families with children are food insecure (unable to consistently afford enough food).²

School-Age Children Suffer from Overweight, Obesity and Poor Nutrition

- By the time they are 11 years old, more than 45% of children in California are overweight or obese.³
- Most U.S. children do not get enough fruits and vegetables. Only 7% of children eat the recommended amount of vegetables, while less than 40% of children eat enough fruit.⁴

School Nutrition Programs Do Not Reach All Eligible Children

Research and common sense tell us that hungry children struggle to reach their full potential. The federal school lunch and school breakfast programs could – and should – do more to address health and hunger across California. On an average day,

- 2.2 million (65%) of California's most vulnerable students miss out on the health and academic benefits of school breakfast.⁵
- The National School Lunch Program reaches 70% of low-income, public school students in California. An additional one million low-income students could be served.⁶

What Can Federal Leaders Do?

Support Science-Based Nutrition Standards

For many children, especially those struggling with hunger and food insecurity, school meal are a critical resource: the most nutritious meals – oftentimes the *only* nutritious meals – that will be received all day. The nutrition standards for the school meal programs should be grounded in science, not driven by politics.

➔ Extend & Strengthen the Commitment to Science-Based Nutrition Standards

Federal Action: Ensure that the nutrition standards for all federal child nutrition programs are based on the latest nutritional science and informed by the recommendations of the Institutes of Medicine. Retain the science-based standards that guide the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs.

Invest in Schools' Capacity to Support Children's Health

Many school districts feel challenged to provide high-quality, fresh and nutritious foods within limited budgets. Increasing resources to help schools provide healthy, high-quality meals is a wise and necessary investment in the health of our children and the viability of our nutrition programs.

➔ Establish a USDA Foods Entitlement for the School Breakfast Program

Federal Action: Facilitate the preparation of nutritious school food by establishing a USDA Foods entitlement for each meal served to a low-income student through the School Breakfast Program. USDA Foods help schools meet the improved nutrition standards and support U.S. agriculture.

➔ Invest in the Modernization of School Food Infrastructure and Equipment

Federal Action: Enable schools to serve healthy, appealing meals. Establish a loan program within USDA to help schools improve kitchen, dining, and food storage infrastructure. Provide targeted grants to help schools acquire the equipment necessary to offer high quality meals to students.

Maximize Access and Participation

Bringing the federal nutrition programs to more children is an effective strategy to decrease hunger, improve nutrition, and positively impact long-term health outcomes. Economies of scale allow these programs to operate at their highest level of efficiency. Expanding access and increasing participation is a win-win for children, administrators, and entire communities.

➔ Eliminate the Reduced-Price Category

Federal Action: Reach more children in need by modifying the existing eligibility criteria for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Programs. Expand the free-meal category to include students with household incomes up to 185% of the federal poverty level, without reducing per-meal reimbursement rates.

Make Sure Meals Are Served When & Where Kids Can Eat

Students in California – and across the nation – report skipping lunch or throwing away parts of their meals because they do not have enough time to eat during the school day. Giving students enough time to eat maximizes the impact of school nutrition resources; food becomes fuel instead of trash and well-nourished students stand ready to learn.

When it comes to breakfast, most schools only offer meals before the first bell rings. That means students who can't get to school early, due to bus schedules or other factors, aren't able to eat. Schools with after-the-bell service models, such as Classroom Breakfast, are able to significantly increase student participation. The use of such models is few and far between – and too many students are still going without school breakfast.

➔ Give Students Adequate Time to Eat

Federal Action: Commission an Advisory Group, including USDA and the Department of Education, to develop evidence-based recommendations and guidelines so that all schools provide students with adequate time to eat school meals.

➔ Incentivize Effective Models for Serving School Breakfast

Federal Action: Make school breakfast accessible to more children in need by offering incentives for high-poverty schools to implement after-the-bell service models. To ensure the long-term benefits of this investment, incentives should include start-up grants, training, and technical assistance.

[1] US Census, 2013; [2] California Health Interview Survey, 2011-12; [3] PedNSS, 2010; [4] CDC Vital Signs, 2014; [5-6] CFPA analysis of California Department of Education data, 2012-13.